

# Islam and Pakhtunwali: Convergence and Divergence of Religious and Cultural Identities among the Pakhtuns of Pakistan

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## Abstract

Pakhtuns of Pakistan emphatically identify themselves with cultural code called Pakhtunwali and with their religion Islam. The centrality of Islam and Pakhtunwali to Pakhtun sense of belonging is widely recognized in the literature. However, there is dearth of literature that would provide rigorous analysis of the relationship between Islam and Pakhtunwali. This study intends to provide such an extensive analysis. The study postulates that the literature represents dichotomous positions on whether Pakhtunwali and Islam coalesce or diverge. The paper also argues that there is growing disjunction between these identities as expressed by Pakhtun nationalist and religious elite in their discourse on identity and conflict in the region. Moreover, this discourse is not only discernable in cyber space (online discussions) but is also observable among the masses in various parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa such as Malakand.

**Keywords:** Pakhtunwali, Islam and Pakhtun identity, Convergence and Divergence of Islam and Pakhtunwali

## Introduction

The ongoing 'war on terror' has drawn considerable international attention of the academia, policy makers, practitioners and the general public. There has been a cogent academic endeavor to comprehend the undercurrents, consequences and perceivable impacts of this war on the larger world. Since this war is primarily waged in the region that stretches across the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, there has been significant academic interest in the region. This interest is partly to understand the geo-political dynamics and partly to comprehend the people inhabiting this region. Although there are numerous ethnic groups residing in the area, the most numerous is the ethnic group called Pakhtuns.<sup>1</sup>

Pakhtuns, (more than 40 million) spread across the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. 1998 Census of Pakistan reveals that, besides the majority of Punjabis (44.15%), Pakhtuns (15.42 %) are the second most numerous ethnic group of Pakistan. Pakhtun in Pakistan are mostly settled in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan and the Federally Administered Areas (FATA). The province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is often identified with Pakhtuns and this is reflected through the recent (19 April 2010) change of its name from North West Frontier Province (NWFP) to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Not only this ethnic group (Pakhtuns) has distinctive presence in the region it is considered the most instrumental in shaping regional politics, socio-economic dispensation, religious ideologies and cultural ethos. Therefore, most of the academic interest is to investigate their

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socio-cultural institutions, historical engagement in regional politics, religious attachments and ideological motivations. In almost all of these enquiries about Pakhtuns, there is discernable allusion to their peculiar ethnic identity; and in some to the complex relationship between their ethnic and religious identities. However, there is no comprehensive and in-depth investigation of the relationship between religious and cultural aspects of Pakhtun sense of belonging. This study intends to do so.

The arguments in this study are primarily based on secondary sources. Secondary sources include published books, pamphlets, and newspaper articles in English, Urdu and Pashto languages. However, insights were also taken from the earlier research work of the first author in Malakand region. These insights were based on analysis of primary sources such as semi-structured interviews with religious leaders in Malakand.

In order to understand the relationship between Pakhtunwali and Islam, it is pertinent to explicate the phenomenon of Pakhtunwali first and then primacy of Islam to Pakhtun identity. After these explanations, the paper undertakes the issue of convergence and divergence between Pakhtunwali and Islam from the perspective of the Pakhtuns.

### **Pakhtunwali**

Pakhtunwali variously defined as ‘the way of the Pathans’,<sup>2</sup> ‘the code of honour’<sup>3</sup> and ‘the manner and customs of the Afghan tribes, the Afghan code’.<sup>4</sup> It is in fact a conglomerate of cultural features deemed ideal by Pakhtuns. Often the list of features gets so exhaustive that it appears an inconclusive cultural code. Some of its glaring features of Pakhtunwali are explained below.

*Melmastia* or hospitality is to serve the outside or guest in different ways. To offer meal to a passing stranger, serving and entertaining friends<sup>5</sup> and distributing gifts or rendering food to win political following.<sup>6</sup> It is the last form of hospitality on which Barth focused in his work on the political leadership in Swat.<sup>7</sup> *Hujra* (male guest house), being the site of hospitality is having wider cultural, social<sup>8</sup> and political functions<sup>9</sup>. The above mentioned literature elaborates that it serves to entertain guests, facilitate to consummate ideal behaviour, host social and cultural activities and perform political function under a khan to distribute gifts and patronage. However, currently its functions are subjected to change due to changing socio-economic situations.

*Jirga* is an important institution of Pakhtun society which refers to the ‘council of elders’<sup>10</sup> or ‘Public assemblies’<sup>11</sup> which solve disputes and its decisions are accepted by the parties in conflict.<sup>12</sup> Barth<sup>13</sup> reported that Jirgas in Swat are a cephalous councils, which were constituted of the land owning ‘Pakhtuns’. However, the multiplicity of forms and roles it performs is widely reported.<sup>14</sup> In its dispute-settling role in Tribal Areas, it combines Islam and Pakhtun customs to reach a decision and such decisions are binding.<sup>15</sup> However, in its other roles it can decide about such minor issues like the site of mosque to much greater task of negotiating with other tribes and government.<sup>16</sup> There could also be official Jirgas appointed by Political Agent in Tribal Areas to investigate and adjudicate disputes.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Jirgas were recently convened as government electing bodies (*Emergency Loya Jirga*- 2002) or constitution making conventions (*Loya Jirga*- 2003-2004) in Afghanistan.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, a series of Jirgas were recently constituted in Pakistan and Afghanistan to facilitate debate and dialogue on the current unrest.

*Pardah* is another feature of Pakhtunwali. Barth insists that it means seclusion of women and through it the 'virility and primacy of the male' in society is ensured.<sup>19</sup> Ahmed concedes Barth that *Pardah* is part of Pakhtunwali and States that women are even denied the right to share in their father's property or to give consent in her own marriage; surprisingly both of these practices are against Islamic teachings.<sup>20</sup>

The above three institutions for Barth facilitate performance on certain basic values which constitute the basis of Pakhtun culture; these include, '*male autonomy and equality, self-expression and aggressiveness*'.<sup>21</sup>

These three central institutions combine to provide Pathans with the organizational mechanisms whereby they can realize core Pathan values fairly successfully, given the necessary external circumstances.<sup>22</sup>

Lindholm<sup>23</sup> and Ahmed<sup>24</sup> identified at least three central features of Pakhtunwali are *Badal*, *Melmastia* and *Nanawāte*. Both Ahmed and Lindholm were studying two different Pakhtun societies i.e. Mohmand Tribal Area and Swat, however, the consistency and uniformity in these features proves them primary constituents of Pakhtunwali. Following is a brief elaboration of the above explanation.

*Badal*, means 'revenge', 'feud', 'vendetta', 'reciprocity' and one of the central features of Pakhtun life. *Melmastia*, means hospitality, although Barth<sup>25</sup> focused on the political and economic aspect of it, Ahmed<sup>26</sup> touched its social and cultural aspect. Ahmed points out that a Pakhtun to Mohmands is '*da melma dost*' (a friend of guests) and that guests in Mohmand Tribal area are served with greater respect and care; even the proudest of Maliks (leaders) would personally serve tea or meal.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Edwards<sup>28</sup> find it a quality demonstrated by rich and poor alike. *Nanawāte*, means 'to go in' or 'refuge'. Ahmed<sup>29</sup> elaborates that it is evoked when an enemy 'goes in' to sue for peace. In such situation magnanimity must be shown even to one's staunchest enemy. Lindholm has explained a different aspect of it, *Nanawāte* in Swat could be requested by those who fled their homes and would like to get into the protection of a khan from their enemy; but in such a case they would become clients of the Khan and would join his army.<sup>30</sup>

Beside these central features, Lindholm extended the list of Pakhtunwali features or values by including 'equality, respect, loyalty, pride, bravery, *Purdah*, pursuit of romantic encounters, the worship of Allah and most importantly the unselfish love for the friend'.<sup>31</sup> Ahmed<sup>32</sup> on other hand stresses that the two most important operative features of Pakhtunwali are Tarborwali (agnatic rivalry) and Tor (female chastity). The central features of Badal (revenge) and Nang (honour) are both translated into Tarborwali (agnatic rivalry) and Tor (women chastity). Recently in an interesting study of elite Pakhtun women, Amineh Ahmed found out that Gham-Khadi (sorrow and joy) celebrations are becoming important part of Pakhtunwali and manifest the concept of badal in its meaning of 'reciprocity' in social relationship.<sup>33</sup>

Raj Wali Shah Khattak<sup>34</sup> has provided a more comprehensive list of Pakhtunwali features and codes. Besides above mentioned features the list includes, *Arbaki*, a tribal soldier who implements the decisions of Jirga; *Ashar*, collective community service; *Atanrh*, folk dance; Defense of homeland, *Tigah*, cessation of violence and peace building; *Peyghor*, taunt, etc.

The above list is inconclusive but represent most important features of Pakhtunwali in the understanding of various local and foreign scholars working on the region. However,

Pakhtunwali is not only a list of features that are considered important by Pakhtuns but it provides a socio-cultural propriety, a code to be observed. Being so central Pakhtunwali is a yardstick through which Pakhtun behavior is evaluated.

Pakhtunwali has served as the ideal model for Pakhtun behaviour. "This model provides a Pathan with self-image, and serves him as a general canon for evaluating behaviour on the part of himself and other Pathans".<sup>35</sup> Ahmed also argues, 'In the ideal, the pursuit of an honourable life, in the eyes of the actor, is equated with a life approximating to the features of Pukhtunwali'.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, being ideal Pakhtunwali also is practiced with varying degree in different regions of Pakhtuns.

It is noteworthy here to suggest that features and notions of Pakhtunwali are not fixed and static. Despite external and internal socio-economic and political pressures, Pakhtunwali features survive. However, this does not mean that they have been changing and reshaping. Ahmed argues that despite the pressure from the encapsulating system (State of Pakistan) Pukhtunwali is still alive among Mohmand Pakhtuns perhaps through '*the rephrasing of its idiom or reordering of its priorities*'.<sup>37</sup> Banerjee also concludes that the '*notions of Pakhtunness therefore are not static but rather the subject of negotiation and innovation*'.<sup>38</sup> Bartlotti<sup>39</sup> in his study argued that Pakhtuns through proverbs '*reconstruct and negotiate notions associated with Pashtunness and Muslimness*'. He argues, '*Pashtunwali as a symbolic system is malleable. It can be used and shaped, manipulated, constructed, deconstructed, and contested...*'<sup>40</sup>

### Islam and Pakhtun identity

Islam is central to Pakhtun identity and society.<sup>41</sup> A Pakhtun is by religion an 'orthodox Muslim'<sup>42</sup> and Muslimness is acquired by birth, '*his place in society as a Pukhtun and a Muslim is thus secured and defined from the moment of birth*'.<sup>43</sup> Consequently for Pakhtuns, '*...Islam was one of the principal constituents of their self-definition, with a Muslim way of life and Pathan tradition being taken as complementary attributes of their identity*'.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, this sense of belonging gives Pakhtuns 'confidence' and '*makes their religion universal and tolerant*'.<sup>45</sup>

Ahmed observed significant 'Islamic symbolism' in Pakhtun behaviour though little comprehension of those symbols. Moreover, these symbols were to be reactivated as they were linked with social status. The proximity of the Mosque with the Hujra represents this symbolism in Tribal Areas.<sup>46</sup> Pakhtuns were also reported to be extending greater importance to and practice of rituals such as Prayers, Fasting, Pilgrimage (Hajj), Zakāt (money paid to the poor) and Jihād.<sup>47</sup> Edwards rather bluntly accepts the centrality of Islam to Pakhtun identity but argue that, "it played a passive role in social affairs and assumed a self-evident dimension of individual and cultural identity".<sup>48</sup>

The significance and closeness of Islam to Pakhtun identity is reflected through its consistent use in the domain of local, national or regional politics. Looking into the ethno-nationalist Khudāi Khidmatgār (KK) movement of Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Banerjee finds it imperative for any political or social movement to refer to Islam. She argues, '*One of the reasons for the KK's great success was the extent to which its ideology was grounded in both Islam and Pukhtunwali*'.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps it was because Islam is also an effective unitary force as it was used as an instrument by the religious leaders to unite Pakhtuns in times of crisis.<sup>50</sup> Edwards<sup>51</sup> argue that there are three contradictory moral codes in Pakhtun society i.e. Honour, Islam and Rule (State); manifested in the institutions of Tribe, religious leaders, and the State. Least concerned with

the institutional presentation of these codes Edwards worked on how these three are incompatible, yet tried to be reconciled in vain (in Afghanistan).

The recent rise and fall of the religious parties alliance MMA (Muttahida Majlis-e-‘Amal) in Pakistan (2002-2008) was keenly observed by scholars to see the use of Islamic symbols or rhetoric in electoral politics in Pakhtun regions. Enormous discussion in the literature on the religious ferment in the region focuses on the way the electoral politics in 2002 focused on appealing to religious aspect of Pakhtun identity in the region.

Some scholars have argued that, besides electoral politics, the uprising of militant Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan manifest transformed ethno-nationalism of Pakhtuns.<sup>52</sup> Yet others consider it part of the broader process of ‘ethnicizing Islam’ in Pakistan.<sup>53</sup> These arguments are challenged by other scholars who explain how Taliban ideals and practice were more rooted in religious ideology than Pakhtun culture.<sup>54</sup> Some have more cautious approach by asserting that the dialectics between Pakhtun identity and ‘neo-fundamentalism’ worked both ways by facilitating Taliban rise and fall in 2001.<sup>55</sup> Despite their differences these scholars agree on the centrality of Islam to Pakhtuns’ political and social existence.

### **Convergence and Divergence**

Islam and Pakhtunwali are major constituents of Pakhtun identity. Scholars are divided on whether Islam and Pakhtunwali coalesce or they coexist in juxtaposition. In this section of the paper, the arguments of various scholars on the question of convergence and divergence are addressed first. This discussion is followed by findings from the fieldwork conducted in Malakand to reflect on the question of convergence and divergence. At the end a close observation and analysis of a discourse among the religious and ethno-nationalist elite in Pakistan about the issue is presented. Then paper elaborates how the boundaries and disjunction between Islam and Pakhtunwali are sharpened by a discourse set in the context of political unrest in the region. This discourse is significant despite the general agreement that Islam is central to Pakhtun identity. Such a discourse is also partly in response to current stereotyping of Pakhtuns.

Barth elaborates that, Pakhtun customs are always imagined to be in line with Islamic preaching. Ahmed supports this position and reports, ‘*Pakhtunness and Muslimness do not have to coalesce they are within each other, the interiority of the former is assumed in the latter*’.<sup>56</sup> Shah endorses these arguments and posit, ‘*for the Pathan Islam was one of the principal constituents of their self-definition, with a Muslim way of life and Pathan tradition being taken as complementary attributes of their identity*’ (1999: 34).<sup>57</sup> However, Ahmed argues that where there is contradiction between the customs and the Islamic law, such as denial of inheritance rights to women and charging interests on loans, Pakhtun would recognize it with guilt.<sup>58</sup> Bartolitti would disagree with Ahmed and argue that Islam and Pakhtunwali have ‘*boundaries and disjunction between them*’ and that Pakhtuns construct symbolic and situational Muslimness.<sup>59</sup>

Edwards<sup>60</sup> in an interesting study of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, explored the relationship between the cultural and religious aspects of Pakhtunness. He elaborates from an encounter between the Mullahs (religious group) and the tribal Pakhtuns on the issue of music and dance. Mullahs deemed dance and music religiously inappropriate and intervened to stop it, this act of Mullah was resented and reacted by the tribal Pakhtuns. Edwards argues that social actors attempted to establish boundaries between cultural performance based in tribal

identity and religious identity.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, he argues that, *'in refugee context, the political and financial power wielded by religious authorities has upset the traditional balance of religion and tribe and has created a disjunctive between fundamental aspects of their identity'*.<sup>62</sup>

Edwards posit that in the refugee context, the dichotomization between *'those who uphold tribal patterns and those who profess primary allegiance to Islam as practical code of social behaviour'* is increasing.<sup>63</sup> He reports that in the refugee environment the balance has swung in favour of religious groups which cherish a different ethical ideal than the tribal ideal of *gheytrat* (defined by him as 'self-determination'). This ideal is *taqwā* (piety) which is characterized by 'submission' (to both faith and the religious elite) rather than 'self-determination' (*gheytrat*). Therefore, *'both gheytrat and taqwā are ideals of personal conduct that express and help to enforce general notions of social propriety'*.<sup>64</sup>

The synthesis of Islam and Pakhtun customs is not limited to living Islam but is well used in political and social reform movements.<sup>65</sup> As discussed above scholars have reported how the leaders in these movements blended Islam with Pakhtun identity to appeal to the masses in the region. Moreover, scholars have shown that relatively less known local movements have used Islamic rhetoric to attract support.<sup>66</sup>

Anthropologically observed, Pakhtun behaviour is always judged by the society through the standards of Pukhtunwali and Islam. However, at some places Pukhtunwali attributes are practiced by Pakhtuns though conscious of the fact that they are against the teachings of Islam.<sup>67</sup> At times they may choose one over the other.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, an important dimension of this relationship between Islam and Pakhtunwali can be elaborated through questioning; are there 'boundaries and disjunction between them'?<sup>69</sup> Barfield found them 'inseparable'<sup>70</sup> and Ahmed<sup>71</sup> argues that, they are within each other. For Bartlotti Pakhtuns draw boundaries between the two and also construct 'symbolic' and 'situational' Muslimness.<sup>72</sup>

Currently Pakhtun historians and intellectuals recognized intimacy of Islam and Pakhtunwali but emphasize harmony between the two.<sup>73</sup> Raj Wali Shah Khattak emphasizes that, *"the relationship between Islam and Pashtunwali is perennial and indestructible. One is a spiritual guide while the other is temporal"*<sup>74</sup>. He adds that mutual respect of boundaries leads to mutual growth and progress. Such harmony has been the Pakhtuns' characteristic and in comparison to other Muslims make them better Muslims.<sup>75</sup> However, below is an explanation of the growing disjunction between Islam and Pakhtunwali from the example of the religious reformist leader observed during fieldwork in Malakand and the emerging discourse that highlights this discontinuity within and outside Malakand.

A local religious leader in Malakand<sup>76</sup> narrating his story of migration to Malakand reflected on these themes. While in village he had to either observe the customs of the land or observe his religious duties. He had to make a choice of moving from his village to an isolated place in Batkhela. If he stayed in his village he would have lost his faith (*"Da emān na khlāṣedal wu"*). Such narration show the perceived disjunctions between the local traditions and Islam and for that matter limitations in observing religion.

The location of this reformist leader on an isolated pinnacle close to the urban center of Malakand (i.e Batkhela), is a symbolic act of distancing from the social and cultural system. Such isolation or physical boundary refers to growing distrust and exclusivity from the cultural system functional in the society. A Pakhtunwali relation with Islam is thus perceived

in this very behavior. The religious leader<sup>77</sup> by severing his relations with his clan and kin in his village and keeping his isolation in Batkhela refer to the fact that cultural requirements are different from the religious requirements. It may also indicate the desperate effort to keep his economic and social autonomy, which will ensure continuity to attack social and cultural disjunctions. Nevertheless, such physical location does not mean religious exclusivity. The religious leader connects himself with sectarian madāris of the region.

The religious leader's behavior not only alludes to the importance of space to reformation but also to the growing dilemma faced by reformists to operate in Pakhtun society. They know the cultural code has features which contradict Islam and partly that is what they would like to reform. But they also know the potential of the cultural code to mobilize support in favor of reforms. This duality is currently effective as charged by the environment in which contradictions between Islam and Pakhtunwali is highlighted.

Edwards study (see above) highlights tension between the religious class and the tribal Pakhtuns.<sup>78</sup> The encounter between the religious and tribal leaders in refugee camp was an attempt to draw boundaries between cultural performance (tribal identity) and religious identity. Therefore, the power wielded by religious authorities disturbed the *'traditional balance of religion and tribe and has created a disjuncture between fundamental aspects of their identity'*.<sup>79</sup>

The ethnographic fieldwork conducted for this study demonstrates the tension between madrasah teachings and some Pakhtun values. This tension is evident not only from narrative but also from the behavior of religious leader. The tension also explains the distance between these two entities. Although, madrasah students were not interviewed for this study but the account of the religious leader (being a product of madrasa and teacher in madrasah) and Edwards observation allude to the tension in religious elements and the Pakhtun society. This also signifies the need of more rigorous research work on madāris in Pakhtun region to elaborate on these themes. Within the limited scope of this study, We have indicated the tension and alluded to important aspect of this tension manifested in the discourse.

Besides the example of religious leader, there has been a discernable discourse that refers to this disjunction. In the background of Afghan Jihad, radicalization of religious schools of thought<sup>80</sup> and the emergence of "neo-Taliban"<sup>81</sup>, has not only created two hardened positions held by Pakhtun nationalists and religious radicals, but also generated discourse about the relationship between Pakhtunwali and Islam.<sup>82</sup> Through these hardened positions the relationship between Pakhtunwali and Islam is interpreted in essentialized way. Moreover, electoral swing from religious parties to nationalist party (2002-2008) has been under the influence of this discourse.

Islamists have deeper inroads into the State and society through their educational institutions, their recognized role of being the guardians of public morality, their regional influence and their stakes in State's nationalist discourse. Ethno-nationalists have been less recognized and appreciated by the State, but their recent electoral victory and increasing public disappointment in face of unrest in the region at the hands of Islamist strengthen their position. Pakhtun nationalists, both Awami National Party, Pakhtun Mili Awami Party and Pakhtun nationalist intelligencia have been overemphasizing on non-religious credentials of Pakhtun culture and relegate secondary role to religion. Such thinking is reflected through their argument that religious sentiments and association of Pakhtun have long been

exploited by the State of Pakistan to gain strategic victories in Afghanistan and promote its efforts to assimilate Pakhtuns in Pakistan. They often refer to the secular and non-violent credentials of Khudāi Khidmatgār movement of Abdul Ghaffar Khan.<sup>83</sup>

The discourse is not just limited to political elite, but the educated and intellectual Pakhtuns (in Pakistan and the diasporas) are more actively involved. Numerous organizations, peace forums, literary circles, websites are dedicated to contribute to this discourse.<sup>84</sup> Such discourse has informed and engulfed layman to an educated Diaspora. Due to widespread access to media and other information sources, people in Malakand have been informed by the discourse, shared their concerns about the growing tension in the region and raised questions about the foreignness of the idea and method if not the membership of militant organizations. Most of the concerns were raised by the younger and educated Pakhtuns in Malakand. They also endorsed the nationalists elite criticism of the State's contribution to the unrest.<sup>85</sup>

Religious elite has been very diverse. They include members from religious political parties such as Jam'iyat 'Ulamā-e-Islam and Jamā'at Islāmi and militant elements such as Taliban and Tahrik-e- Nifādh -e-Sharī'at-e-Muhammadi (TNSM). They have been alluding to the centrality and pervasiveness of Islam in Pakhtun society. They have even interpreted Pakhtun cultural elements such as 'honour' by giving it religious connotations.<sup>86</sup> They have also appealed to the traditions of religious millenarian movements of colonial era. The effort of the protagonists of these positions is to establish the dominance of one over the other. Consequently, they are creating two polarized positions and a space that highlights the disjunction between Islam and Pakhtunwali.

This nationalist discourse about the place of religion and the extent of its influence in Pakhtun culture and society is often ignored in the literature that see the intermeshing of Jihad and Pakhtunwali.<sup>87</sup> This discourse appears to be a discourse of resistance, which challenges the interpretation of Pakhtun code in religious terms. In fact it refers to the destruction of the Pakhtun culture and values at the hands of the Taliban. Even voices within the national press recognize that Taliban are blamed for destroying Pakhto poetry, music, arts, culture, dress code and even language.<sup>88</sup> I. A. Rahman reported *'If neo Taliban had their way the Pashtuns' ethno-cultural identity could be as much under threat of extinction as the other ethno-cultural identities within the Pakistan family'*.<sup>89</sup>

The discourse also emphasize the need to discard some of the stereotypes of Pakhtuns, as they conceive Pakhtuns wrongly implicated and find religious radicalism, the product of State policy.

The above-discussed discourse is also manifested in the electoral trends in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The electoral victory of the Pakhtun nationalists (2008) is an important event as was the victory of Islamic parties (MMA). It happened in such succession that it will not be inappropriate to see it as a possible consequence of each other. On the one hand it signified the presence of two very different electoral forces in the province on the other it referred to a trend (probably positive) that people's choice is not always based in clientelistic considerations.<sup>90</sup> Most importantly, the vote negated some of the assumptions that radical elements represent popular sentiments of the region. We tend to avoid explaining popular support swing but insist that the pattern signifies the discourse, which reevaluates the relationship between the constituent elements of Pakhtun identity, which in time may



redefine Pakhtun identity. The dialectics of the discourse are in the positions taken by religious groups and ethno-nationalists.

## Conclusion

Pakhtunwali and Islam are central to Pakhtun sense of belonging. However, recently there is a growing contestation among Pakhtuns on the relationship between ethnic and religious identities. The current conflict in the region has generated a discourse, which manifest such a contestation. Consequently, a discursive disjunction between Islam and Pakhtunwali is shaped by general masses and by the elites (nationalists and religious) on various websites and public forums. This contestation has also polarized the religious and nationalist political elite in Pakistan.

Despite burgeoning academic interest in the region that hosts Pakhtuns, there is little effort to explore the relationship between the religious and cultural aspects of Pakhtun identity i.e. Islam and Pakhtunwali. This paper attempted to explicate how the literature on Pakhtuns refers to convergence and divergence between Islam and Pakhtunwali. Moreover, the paper argued that there is growing disjunction between these identities as expressed by Pakhtun nationalist and religious elite in their discourse on identity and conflict in the region.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> They are also called Pashtuns, Pathans and in some cases Afghans.

<sup>2</sup> James W Spain, *The Way of the Pathans*, 2nd ed. (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1972), 25.

<sup>3</sup> Akbar S Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> Glatzer cited in Bernt Glatzer, "Being Pashtun-Being Muslim: Concepts of Person and War in Afghanistan," in *Essays on South Asian Society: Culture and Politics II*, ed. Bernt Glatzer, Working Paper No 9 (Berlin: Zentrum Moderner Orient, 1998), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Fredrik Barth, "Pathan Identity and Its Maintenance," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, by Fredrik Barth (Long Grove Illinois: Waveland Press, 1969), 120–121.

<sup>6</sup> Fredrik Barth, *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans* (University of London, Athlone Press, 1959), 77.

<sup>7</sup> Barth, *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans*.

<sup>8</sup> Akbar S Ahmed, *Millennium and Charisma Among Pathans: A Critical Essay in Social Anthropology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), 65; Charles Lindholm and Michael E Meeker, "History and the Heroic Pakhtun," *Man* 16, no. 3 (1981): 445,446,468.

<sup>9</sup> Barth, *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans*, 80.

<sup>10</sup> Akbar S Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society*.

<sup>11</sup> Barth, *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans*, 115.

<sup>12</sup> These councils could be 'ad-hoc meeting' or an 'instituted tribunal'. See Barth, "Pathan Identity and Its Maintenance," 121.

<sup>13</sup> Barth, *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans*, 67,116.

<sup>14</sup> Akbar S Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society*, 90; Shaheen Sardar Ali and Javaid Rahman, *Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Minorities of Pakistan: Constitutional and Legal Perspectives* (Surrey: Curzon, 2001), 51; Wardak

Ali, "Jirga: Power and Traditional Conflict Resolution in Afghanistan," in *Law After Ground Zero*, ed. John Strawson (London: The Glass House Print and Cavendish publishing, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Akbar S Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society*, 90–91.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>17</sup> Shaheen Sardar Ali and Javaid Rahman, *Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Minorities of Pakistan: Constitutional and Legal Perspectives*, 50–57.

<sup>18</sup> For details on different forms of Jirga see Wardak Ali, "Jirga: Power and Traditional Conflict Resolution in Afghanistan."

<sup>19</sup> Barth, "Pathan Identity and Its Maintenance," 122.

<sup>20</sup> Akbar S Ahmed, *Social and Economic Changes in the Tribal Areas: 1972-1976* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1977).

<sup>21</sup> Barth, "Pathan Identity and Its Maintenance," 120.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>23</sup> C Lindholm, *Generosity and Jealousy: The Swat Pukhtuns of Northern Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 211.

<sup>24</sup> Akbar S Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society*, 90.

<sup>25</sup> Barth, *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans*; Barth, "Pathan Identity and Its Maintenance."

<sup>26</sup> Akbar S Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>28</sup> David. B. Edwards, *Heroes of the Age: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 67.

<sup>29</sup> Akbar S Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society*, 90.

<sup>30</sup> Lindholm, *Generosity and Jealousy: The Swat Pukhtuns of Northern Pakistan*, 234–235.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>32</sup> Akbar S Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society*, 90–91.

<sup>33</sup> Amineh Ahmed, *Sorrow and Joy Among Muslim Women, the Pakhtuns of Northern Pakistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 03,141.

<sup>34</sup> Raj Wali Shah Khattak, *Pashtunwali, Pashtoono ka tarzay hayat aur zabita-i-Akhlaq* (Peshawar: Pashto Academy, University of Peshawar and Lok virsa Islamabad, 2008), 61–93.

<sup>35</sup> Barth, "Pathan Identity and Its Maintenance," 120.

<sup>36</sup> Akbar S Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society*, 91.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 348–349.

<sup>38</sup> Leonard N Bartlotti, "Negotiating Pakhto: Proverbs, Islam and the Construction of Identity Among Pashtuns" (University of Wales, Oxford Studies for Mission Studies, 2000), 14–15.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Barth, "Pathan Identity and Its Maintenance"; Akbar S Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society*; Bernt Glatzer, "Being Pashtun-Being Muslim: Concepts of Person and War in Afghanistan"; Syed Waqar Ali Shah,

*Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism: Muslim Politics in the North-West Frontier Province 1937–1947* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Mukulika Banerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000); Stephen Rittenberg, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Pakhtuns* (Durham: Carolina Academy Press, 1988); James W Spain, *Pathans of the Later Day* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>42</sup> Barth, "Pathan Identity and Its Maintenance," 119.

<sup>43</sup> Akbar S Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society*, 107.

<sup>44</sup> Syed Waqar Ali Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism: Muslim Politics in the North-West Frontier Province 1937–1947*, 34.

<sup>45</sup> Akbar S Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society*, 107; also see Mukulika Banerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed*.

<sup>46</sup> Akbar S Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society*, 105–115.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 107–108.

<sup>48</sup> David. B. Edwards, "Frontiers, Boundaries and Frames: The Marginal Identity of Afghan Refugees," in *Pakistan: The Social Sciences' Perspective*, by Akbar S Ahmed (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 97.

<sup>49</sup> Mukulika Banerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed*, 160.

<sup>50</sup> Stephen Rittenberg, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Pakhtuns*. Also see Sana Haroon, *Frontier of Faith: Islam in the Indo Afghan Borderland* (London: Hurst and Company, 2007); David. B. Edwards, *Heroes of the Age: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier*.

<sup>51</sup> David. B. Edwards, *Heroes of the Age: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier*.

<sup>52</sup> Anita M Weiss, "Pakistan: Some Progress, Sobering Challenges," in *India and Pakistan: The First Fifty Years*, ed. Selig S Harrison, Paul H kreisberg, and Denis Kux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 132–52; Stephen P Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2005); see also Jousha T White, *Pakistan's Islamist Frontier: Islamic Politics and U.S Policy in Pakistan's North-West Frontier*, Religion and Security Monograph Series (Arlington: Center on Faith and International Affairs, 2008).

<sup>53</sup> Oskar Verkaaik, "Ethnicizing Islam: 'Sindhi Sufis', 'Muhajir Modernist' and 'Tribal Islamists' in Pakistan," in *New Perspectives on Pakistan: Vision For the Future*, ed. Saeed Shafqat (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>54</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia* (New York: Viking, 2008), 14; Ahmed Rashid, "Taliban Drown Our Values in Sea of Blood, Say Political Leaders from the Pashtun Tribes," *Telegraph*, November 22, 2006; Nasreen Ghufuran, "Pushtun Ehnationalism and the Taliban Insurgency in the North West Frontier of Pakistan," *Asian Survey* XLIX, no. 6 (2009): 1092–1114; Farhat Taj, "Taliban Are Pak Army Proxies, Not Pashtun Nationalists," *The Friday Times*, April 30, 2012, <http://www.thefridaytimes.com/beta2/tft/article.php?issue=20120330&page=8#sthash.wKWBSYyV.dpuf>; Muhammad Ayub Jan, "Contested and Contextual Identities: Ethnicity, Religion and Identity among the Pakhtuns of Malakand" (Ph.D, University of York, 2010) ch.7.

<sup>55</sup> Marriam Abu Zahab and Olivier Roy, *Islamist Networks: The Afghan-Pakistan Connection* (London: Hurst and Company, 2004), 70.

<sup>56</sup> Akbar S Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society*, 107.

- <sup>57</sup> Syed Waqar Ali Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam and Nationalism: Muslim Politics in the North-West Frontier Province 1937–1947*, 34.
- <sup>58</sup> Akbar S Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society*, 106.
- <sup>59</sup> Leonard N Bartlotti, “Negotiating Pakhto: Proverbs, Islam and the Construction of Identity Among Pashtuns,” 76.
- <sup>60</sup> David. B. Edwards, “Frontiers, Boundaries and Frames: The Marginal Identity of Afghan Refugees.”
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid., 95–96.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid., 96.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid., 97.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>65</sup> Mukulika Banerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed*; Sana Haroon, *Frontier of Faith: Islam in the Indo Afghan Borderland*.
- <sup>66</sup> Jan, “Contested and Contextual Identities: Ethnicity, Religion and Identity among the Pakhtuns of Malakand.”
- <sup>67</sup> Akbar S Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society*, 106.
- <sup>68</sup> Raj Wali Shah Khattak, “Islam ao Pukhto,” *Meena*, 2007.
- <sup>69</sup> Leonard N Bartlotti, “Negotiating Pakhto: Proverbs, Islam and the Construction of Identity Among Pashtuns,” 76.
- <sup>70</sup> Thomas Barfield, “An Islamic State Is a State Run by Good Muslims: Religion As a Way of Life and Not an Ideology in Afghanistan,” in *Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization*, ed. Robert W Hefner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 215.
- <sup>71</sup> Akbar S Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society*, 107.
- <sup>72</sup> Leonard N Bartlotti, “Negotiating Pakhto: Proverbs, Islam and the Construction of Identity Among Pashtuns.”
- <sup>73</sup> Raj Wali Shah Khattak, “Islam ao Pukhto.”
- <sup>74</sup> My translation from original Pakhto text.
- <sup>75</sup> Raj Wali Shah Khattak, “Islam ao Pukhto,” 16–19.
- <sup>76</sup> Maulana, *Interview*, Batkhela (Malakand) April 12, 2008.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>78</sup> David. B. Edwards, “Frontiers, Boundaries and Frames: The Marginal Identity of Afghan Refugees.”
- <sup>79</sup> Ibid., 95–96.
- <sup>80</sup> Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, “The Rise of Sunni Militancy in Pakistan: The Changing Role of Islamism and the Ulama in Society and Politics,” *Modern Asian Studies* 34, no. 1 (2000): 139–80.
- <sup>81</sup> Jousha T White, *Pakistan’s Islamist Frontier: Islamic Politics and U.S Policy in Pakistan’s North-West Frontier*.
- <sup>82</sup> A Pakhtun peace Jirga was held in Peshawar in November 2006, where these positions were openly demonstrated by the nationalist leaders of ANP and Pakhtunkhwa Mili Awami party and the religious parties such as JUI . See Ahmed Rashid, “Taliban Drown Our Values in Sea of Blood, Say Political Leaders from the Pashtun Tribes”; Ahmed Rashid, “Pashtuns Want an Image Change,” BBC News, (December 5, 2006), : <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/6198382.stm>.

<sup>83</sup> Ironically KK leadership did appeal Islam and Pakhtunwali. See Mukulika Banerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed*.

<sup>84</sup> See e.g. Online forums such as ‘Justice for Pashtuns’ ([https:// www.facebook.com /justiceforpashtuns](https://www.facebook.com/justiceforpashtuns)), Khyberwatch (<http://khyberwatch.com>), Pashtunforums ([http:// www.pashtunforums.com](http://www.pashtunforums.com)), etc.

<sup>85</sup> State’s involvement cannot be entirely discredited as reports about secret agencies (ISI) plan to establish a “Talibanized belt” in FATA to pressure Afghan government (at least till 2004) is documented. See Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia*, 269–270.

<sup>86</sup> Religious leader in Batkhela defined honor to be struggle in the way of Allah and Islam. This could be a very narrow interpretation of the term, if one look at the understanding of the term by anthropologists such as Ahmed and Barth. See Akbar S Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society Traditional Structure and Economic Development in a Tribal Society*; Barth, “Pathan Identity and Its Maintenance.”

<sup>87</sup> Oskar Verkaaik, “Ethnicizing Islam: ‘Sindhi Sufis’, ‘Muhajir Modernist’ and ‘Tribal Islamists’ in Pakistan.”

<sup>88</sup> I A Rahman, “Pakistan’s Neo Taliban,” *Dawn*, April 30, 2009; Farhat Taj, “Taliban Are Pak Army Proxies, Not Pashtun Nationalists.”

<sup>89</sup> I A Rahman, “Pakistan’s Neo Taliban.”

<sup>90</sup> See Wilder (1999) for voting behavior in Pakistan.